

# Faith, Hope, Tolerance, and Sense of Community

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## Abstract

The challenge of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity has inspired new trends in community research. New models eschew an emphasis on conformity to open communities up to difference, both among members, and between members and an ever more complex social world. The data here are taken from a student-experience study of a diverse post-secondary preparatory academy for high schoolers. The paper examines student reports of the changes they experienced as they progressed through the Academy, building faith, faith in each other and in themselves, hope, necessary to support long-term investment, and tolerance, sufficient to find in their diversity the resources they need to fulfill their dreams. The analysis relies on David McMillan's (1996) sense of community to develop a thick description of student experience in this school community.

Key Words: sense of community, school community, diversity, peers, tutoring, counseling, afterschool, summer, college preparation, preparatory academy

## Introduction

The pursuit of school community has always been part of a more encompassing concern with the decline of what is often called *solidarity*, or a sense of belonging, of mutual responsibility and caring in societies more generally—a topic that came to the center of the social and behavioral sciences with the onset of the industrial era in the West. As a part of that more general concern, the study of community inherited a history of scholarship emphasizing

the importance of conformity, of value consensus, shared symbol systems, and community boundaries (the distinction between “us and them”), elements that challenge the possibility of community in an increasingly diverse social environment (Apple, 2004; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In an effort to meet the challenges posed by diversity, social and behavioral scientists have sought out new ways of characterizing community that discourage exclusion and closure. Increasingly, what we seek to understand are communities that open out to the many different worlds in which they are embedded, that encourage “faith, hope, and tolerance” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 20) while preserving their own integrity.

As an example of this conceptual shift, we might look at one of the most widely applied theoretical schemes, McMillan and Chavis’s sense of community (SOC). In their work published in the *Journal of Community Psychology* in 1986, McMillan and Chavis drew on the traditional research on group cohesion to locate SOC in four elements: Membership, Influence, Integration and Need Fulfillment, and Shared Emotional Connection. McMillan’s revision of the scheme in 1996 resonated major shifts in thinking about community, shifts that Fyson argued opened the model to *transformational community*, community which resolves “some of the tensions between ‘you and me’” (1999, p. 348).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the way these conceptual changes register in our thinking about school community and what it does. The focus of the analysis is the student community in a successful post-secondary preparatory academy housed by a public university in the old-industrialized Northeast (henceforth, “the Academy”). Data for the paper were gathered in the student-experience phase of a study of the Academy. Three questions guide the analysis: Can McMillan’s (1996) revised elements—Spirit, Trust, Trade, and Art—suggest how this community opens to diversity both inside and outside the Academy? Can they help us understand how this diverse school community secures its own integrity while continuing to support individual differences? What insights do these revised elements give us into student accounts of the process by which they have grown into the educational mainstream?

## The Preparatory Academy

Post-secondary preparatory programs find their origin in mid-1960s federal Poverty Program legislation, the prototype being Upward Bound, a program designed to ameliorate the persisting achievement gap, the difference in educational attainment between children from prosperous and middle-income homes and those whose parents are less fortunate. There are three such post-secondary preparatory programs in the Academy: Upward Bound (UB), Upward Bound

Math Science (UBMS), and Academic Alliance (AA). Upon recommendation of high school guidance counselors in neighboring cities, the Programs admit students in grades 9-12 (1) who have been judged by their schools to be academically talented, (2) whose families live at or below 150% of the federal poverty line, and (3) who aspire to be the first in their families to attend college. Students who become part of the Academy participate in afterschool tutoring, regular Saturday sessions of supplemental instruction, extracurricular activities (excursions to cultural centers and ethnic events, seats of government, historic sites, and museums), and a five-week summer program of special classes at the host university during which students are housed and fed at the Academy's expense. Personal and financial counseling are readily available.

Students typically join the Academy the summer before ninth grade. If they remain with the Program and do not continue on at the host university, their participation ends with the "Bridge Program," summer classes at the host university in preparation for college matriculation. Those who elect to continue on at the host university are invited to participate in a college tutoring program, Smart Start.

Students who join post-secondary preparatory programs are, as often not, not only disadvantaged, they are often ethnically and linguistically diverse as well, and the Academy is no exception. In academic year 2006-2007, the year in which the data were collected, Academy records list the student population as 8.7% Caucasian, 2% Asian, 13% African or African American, 8% of mixed ethnic heritage, and 68.3% Latino students of very different origins—from Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, and Guatemala. On the survey that was a part of this study, about a third (28.2%) of these students reported that their parents did not speak English; 19.5% said that they still struggled with English in their classes. Nearly half (44.4%) said they bore some continuing responsibility in the parental home that took them from their studies during the week (taking care of siblings and the like). A large proportion (43.5%) contributed their summer wages to their family's upkeep, and many (30.9%) their wages during the school year. Over half (57.8%) said that they felt they were more at risk than other eligible students, and 54.9% reported that their parents did not know how to help them succeed. At the time of the study, according to Academy records, 100% of its former graduates had moved on into post-secondary education.

## Methods

Research on the Academy's student population proceeded in two phases: (1) an exploratory phase spring and summer 2006, involving focus groups of

students who had graduated from high school and continued on at the host university, and (2) a confirmatory phase in which students' statements from these interviews were submitted to the whole of the regularly attending high school and college population.

### **The Focus Groups**

Focus groups were conducted with Smart Start (SS) students ( $n = 14$ ), spring and summer 2006. (Note: The small size of the Smart Start student group relative to the student population of the entire Academy is an epiphenomenon of the growth of the Academy's student population in the years leading up to the time of the study.) Like all of the materials used in the study, including the informed consent form students signed to participate the study and the student questionnaire constructed from the focus-group data, the interview protocol was approved by the University's Institutional Research Board (IRB). Semi-structured interviews dealt with students' preparation for college life and relevant areas in which—in their tenure with the Academy—they might have experienced change: in their study habits; in their academic success; in their self-concepts; in help seeking; in future plans; and in their relations with teachers, with neighborhood and high school acquaintances, with fellow students at the Academy, and with their families. Questions explored the process through which these changes occurred and how they might have eased the students' transition to college life. Students were also asked how they might change the Programs and how they might be better served. In line with IRB standards, students were promised strict confidentiality. Academy staff had no access to the interviews, to the interview data, or to completed questionnaires.

Ninety-minute interviews were conducted by an unaffiliated faculty member in an office somewhat removed from the Academy's facilities. Students arrived in groups of four to five students each. Interviews were tape recorded. Running notes identified signs of consensus in students' responses to each other's comments. Students were repeatedly asked to reflect on one another's statements: "Have you all had similar experiences?" (see Chipuer et al., 1999 for a similar criterion).

Rapley and Pretty (1999, p. 679) have cautioned against research techniques that impose concepts on students, that may not represent students' own "categories in use" as they talk among themselves about their experiences. Accordingly, neither community nor SOC appeared in the interview protocol; these topics entered into consideration only as they were introduced by the students. No standardized scales were used. Student statements which elicited high levels of agreement in the interviews were transcribed, cleaned of any identifying material, and transformed into a series of Likert-type items (5 =

strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). There were 126 items of this kind, including statements that seemed to contradict the dominant opinion—this to control for confirmation bias. These items—together with demographic, academic, family, and neighborhood data and a series of evaluative questions with respect to Program components—were submitted to the whole of the Academy's student population.

### **Questionnaire Administration**

The questionnaire was administered to high school and Smart Start students and to students who had graduated from high school and chosen to attend colleges and universities other than the host institution for the academic year 2006-2007. High school students completed the questionnaire during regularly scheduled Saturday sessions, Smart Start students, when they came into the tutoring center. Of the high school students, 98% (105/107) completed the questionnaire, of the Smart Start group for fall 2006, 100% ( $n = 19$ ). With three mailings and two phone solicitations, completed questionnaires were received from only 57% (13/23) of Academy graduates at other colleges and universities. Students at these other schools were reflecting on their experience in the Academy a year or more distant. Because they were no longer involved in the Academy and because of the low response rate, data from this last group were used only to check for systematic variation between these students and students who remained in contact with the Academy. No significant differences emerged, though results regarding this portion of the analysis must be qualified by the low response rate.

Interview data were analyzed by the investigator using the grounded theory method of constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Turner & Husman, 2008; Van Vliet, 2008). Constant comparison is an inductive method for analyzing a stream of qualitative data. It begins with the identification of meaning units, here, in the recorded focus group interviews. An example of a meaning unit or data bit would be this statement from a student: "I get better and better at putting the different pieces of my life together now and understanding who I am." The contents of meaning units are compared, establishing categories of data bits. Categories are explicitly defined, first, in very concrete terms. As the comparison of data bits within and across categories continues, categories become increasingly abstract and the relationships among categories are clarified. Comparison and categorization of data bits and the definition of categories continues until the analysis reaches a point of saturation at which all of the data have been accounted for and further work adds little or nothing to the analysis. Constant comparison thus yields an interpretation of a data stream.

Within the general context of the students' reports of their growth in the Program there were nine general categories: growth in intersubjectivity, reflexivity, autonomy, self-control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of community, together with changes in interpersonal relations and in accommodation to the academic environment (including study skills). Accommodation to the academic environment included Jerome Bruner's capacity "to go beyond the information given" (Bruner, 1973, pp. 218-237) or to create new knowledge. A final category was reserved for statements evaluating Program elements. Results of the analysis, cleaned of all identifying material, were shared with the Director of the Preparatory Academy and his comments elicited.

## **Results: Community and Diversity**

Post-secondary preparatory programs generally pursue community among participants (Dottin, Steen, & Samuel, 2004; Gándara, 2005; Gándara & Bial, 2001; Jehangir, 2009; National Study Group, 2004). But this community may look very different from the one envisioned in the 1986 McMillan and Chavis model, and the Academy's student community is no exception. McMillan's revision of the scheme in 1996 resonated major shifts in thinking about community in at least five ways: (1) It recognized what some had come to feel was the most important need individuals brought to community: freedom from shame (Nathanson, 1995; Rorty, 1989); (2) It allowed for the importance of discourse and the individual's need to express what he or she really feels (Habermas, 1995); (3) It highlighted the importance of "just" authority (Habermas, 1995); (4) It underlined the role of diversity in need fulfillment (Giddens, 1991, 1994); and (5) it recognized the significance of narrative (Rorty, 1989), as narrative captures what is "transcendent and eternal" in the shared history of the community (McMillan, 1996, p. 323). Student reports of their experience in this school community reflect the need to move beyond the elements of Membership, Influence, Integration and Need Fulfillment, and Shared Emotional Connection to emphasize the elements of McMillan's revised model—Spirit, Trust, Trade, and Art—insofar as they see these elements as working to (1) foster a sense of belonging, mutual caring, and responsibility, as they (2) accommodate to diversity, and (3) extend the boundaries of this community, adapting to a larger and larger range of environments—including the academic environment of higher education.

### **Spirit**

In McMillan and Chavis's 1986 SOC, the first element, Membership, underlined the importance of boundaries between "us and them" (created in part

by shared symbol systems, e.g., Black Power's clenched fist) to the "security that protects group intimacy" (1986, p. 10). This element does not fully capture students' experience of the Academy. There are, for example, no identifying t-shirts, caps, or symbols to distinguish students who attend the Academy. Guidance counselors report that the Academy's students merge easily into their respective high schools during the week. Continued participation in the Programs requires regular attendance at afterschool tutoring and Saturday sessions. Interaction over many years is the rule. But while students participate in the community, they return daily to the high schools and neighborhoods from which they are drawn and to homes vital to ongoing emotional and financial support. Student interaction is more intense during the summer months on campus, but this too is penetrated again and again by contacts with the college environment, particularly as students occupy student housing and patronize university dining halls and local businesses. What, then, accounts for the requisite emotional security students report? McMillan's answer is Spirit, the drawing power of friendship.

Spirit implies continuing "faith that I will belong" and I will be accepted (McMillan, 1996, p. 117), an environment in which students can see themselves "mirrored in the eyes of others" (pp. 315-316). In the survey, 71% of the students at every level of the Academy—grades 9-12 and college participants—agreed (agree + strongly agree), "I feel I can be more myself with the people in the Academy;" 79% agreed, "I am much more my own person since I joined the Academy," and 89.5% agreed, "The students in this Program rely on each other; we take care of each other. It's like having another family."

Student: Upward Bound is very diverse; it's like a melting pot. Everyone treats everyone else as an equal. We live with each other in the summer, and we see each other every day, 24/7. You have to learn to get along. You have to learn to deal with other people's faults. No matter who you are, where you are from, you are accepted.

## Trust

In McMillan and Chavis's 1986 SOC, the second element, Influence, indicates a transactional "force toward uniformity...[coming] from the person as well as the group...uniform and conforming behavior indicates that a group is operating to consensually validate its members as well as to create group norms" (p. 11). In 1996, McMillan revised this element to focus on Trust. Trust implies something more than member influence and a strain toward conformity. Trust suggests that a community "has solved the problems arising from the allocation of power," of "processing information and making decisions" (1996, p. 318). In McMillan's 1996 SOC, Trust demands justice, authority based on



principle. In the Academy, justice demands fairness, an understanding that students will make mistakes, and an openness to trying again. In the survey of the Academy, 97.5% of the students affirmed, “This program doesn’t let those stereotypical barriers that society sets on you be a reason to fail;” 71.6% agreed, “It’s important to me that teachers do not dwell on my mistakes.”

Student: They [staff] make you feel good about yourself because they don’t dwell on the mistakes you make, like “You’re so bad; oh, you’re so bad.” They say, “OK, you did a mistake. OK, this is what you have to do to fix it.” They never close a door; they leave your options open.

Established norms, rules, and laws are critical if members of a community are to know what to expect from one another and to “develop a sense of personal mastery,” writes McMillan (1996, p. 319). However, norms, rules, and laws must not be so confining that they threaten members’ capacity to “speak the truth”—particularly about their feelings about themselves and others. In the Academy, close relationships among staff and students sensitize adult tutors to unanticipated individual needs and challenges:

Student: She [one of the tutors] just called me right now to see how I was doing. She knew I was tired yesterday, and I had so many things to do. She just didn’t ask me about my grades. She said, “How are you doin’; how are you feelin’?”

Sensitivity to the very different needs students bring to the Programs is furthered by the tutors’ practice of actively transferring their own skills to the students, engaging and training the students in openness and helpfulness in their relations with themselves and each other.

Student: In the Academy, you learn to study like you do with the tutors. You ask yourself questions about the reading, schedule your own time—things like that. We learn to help other students with their work and encourage them like the tutors do.

The result is an open space in which the students feel they can let down their defenses, explore their own strengths and weaknesses, and negotiate the conditions they need to grow.

Student: You are forced to mature here.... You grow up; it happens without your realizing it. You learn how to negotiate with people—to get the kinds of conditions you need. You learn to deal with other people’s differences.

Acceptance and continuing problem-focused discourse are associated in the students’ experience of marked growth in reflexivity, or “the capacity to attend to one’s own thoughts and feelings, what one ‘brings to the table’” (Bruner,



1996, p. 35). From the students' perspectives, growth in reflexivity is one of the most important benefits of participating in the Academy, with nearly all (95.2%) reporting, "I get better and better at putting the different pieces of my life together now and understanding who I am."

Peer tutoring and counseling, another of the core functions of the Academy, encourages feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem as well:

Student: If someone needs help, [the adult tutors] interpret it and explain it. Like before, I was the type of person who could read and understand it, but when it came to explaining it to [another student], I had no idea how to get that information to her. And I feel like now, I can like read and interpret it and relate it to her in a way that she can understand it by giving her examples.

A large portion of students (89.5%) echoed the sense of growing empowerment so evident in the focus groups: "I feel much more powerful since I joined the Academy; I feel I can handle things better."

Growth in self-efficacy and self-esteem registers in other areas of the students' activities, encouraging them to take more control of their lives. In the survey, 92.7% of the students agreed, "I think a lot about my future now and how what I am doing will affect it," 96.8%, "Now I listen to other people, but I make up my own mind," 93.5%, "I can hold my own in discussions now even about important issues," and 94%, "I have learned to deal with people who might look down on me and to hold my own in ways that do not get me into trouble."

The experience of this open space in which they are accepted, of stable norms and rules that allow them to plan and predict and grow, participation in the core functions of the Programs, and the prevailing sense that the authority the Academy exercises is just are associated with widespread support for the Programs. Students do feel the pressure to meet academic standards. In the survey, 58% of the students revealed that they were "as afraid of failing" as they "used to be." At the same time, 73.4% agreed, "You have to do something really ignorant to get kicked out of the Academy."

Student: I would make the standards even higher. People get kicked out because of their attitude. And you wonder why people do the things that they do....If you get kicked out, it has to be something very ignorant.... Like these two girls today, for fighting. You ask, "How can they be so stupid that they can't control themselves?"

Close relationships with teachers and the peer tutoring and counseling work against any seeming apathy toward students' difficulties (Monroe, 2009), breaking down barriers to the internalization of Program goals (Hallinan,

Kubitschek, & Lui, 2009). In the survey, 82.5% of the students observed, “I feel badly about myself when I slack, when I do not try hard,” and 86.1%, “I have gotten to a point at which I keep driving myself to do better and better.”

## Trade

Relationships are cemented, argued McMillan and Chavis in 1986, when they are reinforced. Value consensus integrates a community; complementary statuses and roles provide for reciprocal reinforcement (p. 13).

Student data from the Academy suggest the limited contribution of value consensus to our understanding of community under conditions of diversity. Continued participation in the Academy requires maintenance of academic standards in high school and college classes and conformity to the STAR policy, “setting the tone for an atmosphere of respect,” in students’ interactions with both staff and other students. But outside these basic requirements, conformity—the sharing of values and culture and symbol systems—is limited by the ethnic diversity of participants. Diversity, moreover, is encouraged; in fact, honoring diversity serves as one of the touchstones of the Programs.

The emphasis on the integrating force of value consensus in the 1986 model echoed a similar theme in traditional sociology. By 1996, sociology had moved on and so had McMillan. In McMillan’s 1996 revision, the third element in the 1986 model, Integration and Need Fulfillment, is replaced by Trade. Speaking of this element, McMillan (1996) writes that, of the resources members provide for one another, none is more important than freedom from shame.

The guilt students experience from internalizing Program goals, suggest Orth, Berking, and Burkhardt (2006), does not have the same potentially maladaptive consequences as shame. Shame indicates a global judgment on the self, not on a behavior—one feels guilty about a behavior—but rather, on the whole self (Lewis, 2003). A self shamed is a self unworthy, fundamentally flawed. Particularly in a case in which shame is unacknowledged, when the individual attempts to hide shame from consciousness, the experience has been associated with painful, at times disabling, mental and emotional consequences (Scheff, 1990). Scheff (2006) has defined shame as a threat to the social bond. The opposite of shame is “attunement,” a sharing of minds; attunement is a source of pride (Scheff, 2006, p. 144; see Walton & Cohen, 2007, on the differential effect of belonging on White and Black students’ achievement). The STAR policy, the demand that students treat each other with respect, is a central feature of the Academy:

Student: People say to you, “How can you get up at seven o’clock on a Saturday morning to go to school.” But, this isn’t like going to school. We are respected here. We treat other people with respect.

Freedom from shame together with peer counseling and tutoring open the door to self-disclosure, the “medium of trade” in a diverse community (McMillan, 1996, p. 321). Self-disclosure—revealing my own perspective on a topic, my approach to my classes, the way in which I handled a particular problem, how I feel about a shared circumstance, the difficulty with which I feel I need help—not only alerts adult tutors and friends to problems the students encounter; as the students share with one another, it also puts into circulation new ideas and perspectives (Geldard & Patton, 2007) critical to students who are experiencing significant change, both personal and academic.

A significant number of students in this study reported substantial change both personally and in their relations with family and neighborhood as a result of their participation in the Academy. A majority (64.2%) of survey respondents agreed with the focus groups, “I try to find a balance now between who I am in the Academy, and who I was before,” 54.1%, “Things have really changed with my parents and my friends back home, but we work these things out. It’s easier because the students are all in this together and we talk about it,” and 79.5%, “We work out our problems together in the Academy, even when the tutors are not here.”

Judging from the student reports, moreover, it’s difficult to separate out growth in understanding each other’s personal problems from the contribution self-disclosure makes to academic success. “When we study in groups,” answered 89.6% of the students, “people have different ways of thinking about things, and I think it helps me understand.” “I learn new methods of studying from other students in the Program,” answered 75%. And this is associated with marked growth in accommodation to what Bruner (1996) has called the “culture of education.”

The study produced high levels of agreement on all of the culture of education items, a large portion of the students agreeing (84.7%), “I am beginning to feel that I can master the material in my classes, that I am understanding it like my teachers do,” 92.7%, “The Program has helped me think more deeply about things,” 93.5%, “I no longer just absorb knowledge; I get ideas of my own now. I figure out new things for myself,” 86.3%, “Sometimes I think about my class work outside of class and how it might apply to what I am doing,” and 75.8%, “I participate more actively in my classes than I used to.” Moreover, in the students’ experience, self-understanding is to a high degree dependent on their understanding of others, with just over 83% of the students at all levels of the Academy agreeing, “The more I learn about other people, the better I feel I understand myself.”

Contributing to the community is critical to members’ feelings of belonging (McMillan, 1996). Interaction and mutual investment in each other’s

work tends to lead to a condition McMillan labels a “state of Grace” in which students stop counting, in which they readily share in each other’s successes (1996, p. 322). In the survey, 90.3% of the students agreed, “We compete in the Program, but I am happy when one of us does well, even if it’s not me.”

From the students’ perspective, growth in intersubjectivity, the capacity “whether through language, gesture, or other means” (Bruner, 1986, p. 20) to “understand the minds of others” (pp. 40-42) is another of the most important aspects of their progress through the Academy. Growth in reflexivity and intersubjectivity develops students cognitively. They become more capable of dealing in abstract principles as these relate to their lives and those of others. They develop empathy. These skills are critical to being able to participate in local and national deliberations and to a sense of being a part of the larger sociopolitical arena (Habermas, 1995). “People come from different places; their backgrounds are different. When I know how they are, I can deal with them,” said 92.8%. Over 80% agreed, “I feel I understand life and lots of things outside my home and my neighborhood better than I did before I joined the Academy.”

As they grow in reflexivity and intersubjectivity, the students become more confident of their capacity to maintain their own individual boundaries, to decide for themselves regardless of what their friends say or do. They have a greater sense of *individual autonomy*, or the individual’s capacity to “feel choiceful” in one’s action and “be the locus of the initiation of those actions” (Kaufman & Dodge, 2009, p. 102). Research has found separation-individuation, or “the developmental process...[beginning]...with separation from parents, peers, and other significant persons...[and extending]...to individuation and the development of a coherent, autonomous self” (Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004, p. 213), is facilitated by a relational context in which students maintain strong ties with others and is positively associated with college student adjustment (Mattanah et al., 2004).

As students disclose themselves to one another, they discover unforeseen ways in which their differences might serve one another. Giddens (1994) has called the process by which one becomes at once both more autonomous and more aware of one’s interdependence with others *individualization*. Individualization is associated not with a rejection of outsiders, but with a tendency to relate to people everywhere in a different way:

Student: I thought when I came here all of my friends would be just like me, you know, serious about their classes. After a while, you begin to notice little things, like not coming to class and coming late to class. And you begin to realize every person is himself for a reason. Before, you know, you see the leader and you follow subconsciously, because its cool

and it feels good. But my perspective on my friends has changed. I am myself. They are themselves.

Student: I was like in the gifted and honors program in high school, and I was one of two Latino students, so a lot of kids would say, "Wow! You're in the wrong spot. This is hard." I'm just like, "OK." Then at the end of the marking period, I'd be the one with an A, and they'd be like, "How'd you do that; you must have cheated." I'm like, "No, I read the book, and I did the homework. Ha! How'd you like that?" And my senior year was a year of change. 'Cuz a lot of kids saw me not as Puerto Rican, but as an equal....Especially in my chemistry class. We started having real in-depth discussions about religion, all kinds of things. By the time the year ended, we were closer to each other than we would be amongst people of our own race.

Student (a young African-American woman): I've had people come up to me and say, "Oh, you think you're better because you're 'white.'" Things like that. In high school, the first thing that would come to my mind: "Oh, you're not going to disrespect me. I don't care who you are." My anger would come out. But now, I tend to want to educate them. Like I just go, "You think I'm white because I speak well. Well, let me tell you that not all white people speak well."

Student: I think, like, I expect less from my friends. When I go home, I take the time to understand what my friends [who are not part of the Academy] are doing, but they don't take the time to understand why I do what I do. But now I don't expect everyone to understand everything I do. If they don't understand, then I understand, because I don't have such high expectations.

The students are learning to transcend the Academy's community. The diversity of the Academy's students one from another and their differences from staff and tutors provide not limits, but possibilities—the option of "going for it" with growing confidence that they will succeed. A student articulates a central point:

Student: We really have an advantage. Like in our class, if you were closed-minded, it would be a lot harder to start a study group with a lot of people you don't know. Like suppose you are in a class with a bunch of Latinos, a bunch of Blacks, a bunch of Asians. So instinctively [if you are "closed-minded"], you will go with the other white people....instead of spreading it out....[T]hat really helps you....Like if you get a group that is a bunch of different people from different countries and cultures, you'll get different ideas and different points of view. That may be that

extra edge that you need for that essay....That's one of the things the Academy helps you see, that diversity is really a great thing...it helps you.

### Art

Finally, to encounter the Academy's students is to encounter narrative, as evidenced by all of the stories behind the interview statements above. Stories which affirm the central values of this diverse community lead to *redescription* (Rorty, 1989), narratives that open possibilities, ever new ways of dealing with the conflicts that plague the students' lives as they grow into the mainstream. McMillan and Chavis's (1986) fourth element, Sense of Emotional Connectedness, relied on community organization, events at which members might acknowledge their bonds. The fourth element in McMillan's revised scheme (1996), Art, is again more fluid, growing, metamorphosing, more in keeping with the nature of this open community. Art acknowledges the importance of students' redescriptions of what they have come to expect of others and of themselves as they extend themselves out into their worlds (Rorty, 1989). Art provides moments to reflect on Spirit (McMillan, 1996), but it also, at one and the same time, leads not to closure, but to ever more understanding as students grow into and with their many worlds.

### Summary and Discussion

Traditional concepts located community in conformity, shared values, and common symbol systems. These concepts are not adequate to capture what the Academy's students mean when they talk about community. Over 91% of these students (including students who were in their first year) reported, "As they work together year after year, the students...build their own community." Yet as we have seen, the students themselves view this community as very diverse, and they have come to value this diversity as an important component in their growth.

The analysis suggests that the SOC these students report can be captured by community psychologist David McMillan's four elements: Spirit, Trust, Trade, and Art (1996). This is a community founded in acceptance and authenticity, just authority, a fruitful exchange of resources, and the collective creation of narratives that resonate the transformation of their lives. Associated with these elements is growth in reflexivity and intersubjectivity, in personal mastery, in boundary maintaining behaviors, and in individual autonomy, self-esteem, and sense of self-efficacy. As applied to school community, the data suggest extending SOC in at least four ways.



First, McMillan (1996) has emphasized the importance of freedom from shame in community members' relations with one another. In the interviews it was difficult to discern which the students regarded as the greater achievement—freedom from shame or their growing capacity to avoid shaming others—an important source of pride in this community. Traditional sociology leads us to expect that being part of a community that actively meets the ideals of American democracy is, in itself, rewarding (Collins & Makowsky, 2010); the Academy's student community is no exception.

Second, and also very important, is an educational environment that addresses the whole person. It is not only good grades that motivate these students. It is the continuing process of personal development, the sense of power inherent in the process of extending one's capacities to deal with any situation with which one is presented. Not to be ignored is the resemblance between this school community and the vision Dewey (1966) placed at the center of U.S. education nearly a century ago. This is a school community that prepares students to find community with their fellows and to continue to grow together wherever they find themselves.

Third is an environment in which life is other than a one possibility thing—in which I can choose who I am rather than accepting what is handed to me. McMillan (1996) touches on this when he talks about being accepted for what is authentically me. Integral here is a vision of failure as an opportunity for growth, not an end of new visions. The right to fail encourages trying new things. A related point notes the richness of the resources these students provide for one another. Recall here that the breadth of available resources in the Academy is dependent on the students' diversity (see McMillan, 1996). And fourth are opportunities to integrate all of these experiences into a coherent sense of self. Discourse is an important facilitating component here.

The big question here is this: Can any of what we have learned from this school community be applied in the high schools from which these students come? Also, can these insights inform the development of community in other schools at other levels in other regions? It is here that the limitations of the study are readily apparent. This is a school community of less than 150 students. The diversity here pales in comparison to most urban schools. The most pressing research need in exploring the potential of this SOC is to see what it can tell us about successful school community in even more diverse or more typical educational environments.

There are other limitations. While the analysis focuses on the high level of agreement on survey items, on no item was agreement complete. With more resources, the study might well have explored the experience of these naysayers and students who had dropped out of the Academy. Also, whatever a student's



interpretation of his or her experience, that experience was inevitably penetrated from the first by the staff's own sense of what the Academy was trying to do. In support of the study's results are the detailed and insightful ways in which students make their cases as reported above, and the Academy's success rate in passing graduates on to post-secondary education.

As budgets tighten and postsecondary preparatory programs can no longer obtain the resources to continue, one looks to these programs for approaches that can be applied in mainstream educational environments, for ways of accommodating the needs of disadvantaged students in the course of a normal school day. In courting this possibility, it is important not to underestimate what the Academy's students share with others more privileged. Privileged students deal with a complex environment as well, full of people and cultures they do not understand, a world that may at times seem alien and threatening. Privileged students can be shamed. They need to integrate new experiences into a coherent sense of self. They can be empowered by learning to help others. They will benefit from life-extending stories. At the same time, implementing the Academy's program in mainstream educational institutions faces formidable obstacles. Among these, at least two would seem especially productive avenues for ongoing research.

The most pressing would appear to be locating effective ways of building school communities which are free from shame in which students feel free to be themselves, to make mistakes, and to try on new ideas and behaviors without fear of rejection. Certainly prejudice and discrimination are potent sources of shame; but there are other sources as well, many endemic to surrounding communities.

Shame has many positive functions. "[T]he wish to avoid shame motivates maturation and development, and the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and success" (Gilligan, 2003, p. 1173). It alerts the individual to violations of internal or external standards and rules (Lewis, 2003). When it is endogenous, relevant for the matter at hand, it can encourage commitment to prosocial behavior and achievement (de Hooze, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2008). It promotes a "realistic self-appraisal" (Nathanson, 1987, p. 262). Persistent, repeated, toxic shame, particularly when it is internalized, however, has been related to a variety of potentially debilitating mental and physical conditions: "depression, anxiety, somatization, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, paranoid ideation, psychoticism" (Tangney, 1995, pp. 1140-1141). Because shame is about the self (not about specific actions as is the case with guilt), it can shut down adaptive action altogether. "[R]ather than resetting the machine...[adopting more acceptable behavior]...it stops the machine. Any action becomes impossible because the machine itself is wrong" (Lewis, 2003, p. 1189). Nathanson (2001,

2003) reports on ongoing research in this area with respect to the desire to eliminate school violence. The Tomkins Institute's DVD "Managing Shame, Preventing Violence: A Call to Our Teachers" is an aid for dealing with shame in the classroom. There are other resources. Persisting problems suggest that much remains to be done.

A second challenge for ongoing research has to do with responding intelligently to the great variety of individual student needs and challenges. It is the awareness of need that spurs the development of diverse resources in the Academy. But, even in the Academy, intense relationships between full-time Program tutors and a small number of students are not adequate to sensitize the school community to individual need without the aid of peer tutoring and counseling. These data suggest that part of the solution in the schools generally lies in a similar recourse.

In the Academy, students' skill in peer tutoring and counseling developed naturally out of their experience with the adult tutors. Public school teachers seldom if ever have the luxury of spending so much one-on-one time with students. There is a need for much more work on the possibilities and implementation of peer tutoring and counseling, particularly under conditions in which more attention is being directed toward competition in both school and society.

With all that, this research suggests that the vision of student communities that build faith, hope, and tolerance is not a hollow promise. Such student communities exist. From the perspective of these students, communities that build faith, hope, and tolerance build whole persons as well. To paraphrase what one student told me, as we grow into our worlds, we grow into ourselves. The foundation for this growth is community.

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